

LITERACY PROGRAMS WITH PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Literacy Programs with Parent Involvement

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Literacy Programs with Parent Involvement

The purpose of this working paper is to review current literature on literacy programs for parents of English language learners (ELLs). The paper includes a summary of five literacy programs for ELL parents throughout the United States of America. Four of these were system-wide interventions affecting more than one school or classroom. Each program had a positive impact on student academic achievement. Three programs focused on empowerment for both students and parents. The most powerful interventions were supported by the community, parents and school and school district personnel and included varying degrees of involvement by university educators. Three interventions specifically targeted students and parents at the secondary level. The paper concludes by summarizing the success criteria shared by the programs.

Community Support for Students, Parents and Teachers--The Georgia Project, Whitfield County, GA

Strong partnerships engage and enlighten students as they empower both the school and the community. Through this partnership students gain access to a powerful combination of mentors and resources which would have been difficult, if not impossible, to attain without the partnership (Narcisse, 2007).

The Challenge

The daughter of a retired county congressman and judge in Whitfield County, Georgia, served as a paraprofessional in a public elementary school in the county. She brought her concern to her father that many of the Spanish-speaking students in the school were not able to perform well in school and there was a barrier to communication between the students and their parents with the teachers and the school (Narcisse, 2007).

Relevant Demographics

Beginning in 1995, drastic change in county demographics was caused by a significant immigration of Latino families into the community to work in carpet mills and poultry industry. Latino students rose to more than 75% of the student population in the two school districts in the county—Dalton city schools and Whitfield County Schools¹. While the schools had certified teachers for English as a second language (ESL), they had very few teachers who spoke Spanish and fewer who understood the culture of the Latino children and their families. The community was not aware of the extent of the problem and the schools were not prepared with needed resources to address the needs of this new majority student population (Narcisse, 2007).

The Response

After hearing about the problem from his daughter, Mr. Erwin Mitchell attempted to learn about the problems Latino students and their teachers were having and to develop a strategy to address those problems. He made several visits to city and county schools to learn about the problems firsthand and to address the problems with the superintendent and other community leaders. He wanted to learn if there was an educational strategy available to resolve the problem. As Mr. Mitchell talked with teachers, administrators, and other school employees, he began to notice that the situations in the schools were being ignored by the community. He mobilized support from some of the most influential people in the community to help develop a strategic action plan to solve the problem in the schools. As they explored the problem further the group discovered that no “one-size-fits-all” solutions were available and that the problems involved both cultural issues and language issues (Narcisse, 2007).

Mr. Mitchell went to the chief executive officer (CEO) and chairman in the carpet industry to brainstorm ideas on how to address the needs of the Hispanic students in the

community. The CEO suggested that they explore the possibility of bringing bilingual teachers to Dalton to help. The CEO did business in Monterrey, Mexico, and knew of the reputation of the University of Monterrey and of its teacher preparation program. The two visited the University of Monterrey and the University sent a delegation from its department of education to visit the schools in Dalton.

Once Mr. Mitchell brought together the right mix of influential sources in the community, a partnership began to evolve. Once the needs and concerns were identified and solutions became clear on how to help the community, “the University of Monterrey, the city of Dalton, Dalton City schools, the Whitfield County schools, and the Georgia Project signed an accord for a partnership concerning an exchange of teachers that would help the communities in many capacities” (Narcisse, 2007, p. 79).

The Dalton City Council approved seed money of \$750,000 for the Georgia Project initiative. The Georgia Project requested that the money be given to the city schools of Dalton to set-up the program and the summer institute. According to school system employees and Georgia Project members, this money was not used for the Georgia Project initiative. Subsequently, the Georgia Project requested that funding go directly to the Georgia Project for allocation (Narcisse, 2007).

As soon as instructors from the University of Monterrey arrived, there was a dramatic change in the level of parental involvement. One of their strategies was to become involved in Hispanic events in the community and to inform parents of these events. These Georgia Project instructors also offered counseling for parents and began to provide ESL classes for parents. These instructors also assumed roles as interpreters of both language and cultural norms. As parent participation began to rise, parents formed organizations to help their children improve

their grades. In schools with Georgia Project teachers, parent participation rose from one percent in 1996 to 95% in 2006 (Narcisse, 2007).

Key Characteristics of the Program

By sponsoring bilingual teachers from the University of Monterrey who can help parents and students assimilate while respecting cultural differences, the Georgia Project addresses the needs of an ever-growing population of students and of immigrant families who speak Spanish as their primary language. The community partnership is united in a common purpose and offers professional opportunities to local and future teachers to meet their needs as well.

As the Georgia Project developed its strategies to help newly arrived students, it made alliances with local businesses and community members to create organizations that would reflect the Latino community. One such organization is the *Alianza Comunitaria Latino Americana* (ACLA), also known as the Latin American Community Alliance (LACA). The organization is composed of members from different professions, such as physicians and local business owners. ACLA has worked with the Georgia Project to help Latino students and community members become comfortable and integrated in the community. The organization has worked with local businesses as sources for mentors and internships. ACLA has also sponsored programs for parents and has helped immigrant families to secure good housing. Working with Dalton College and community colleges in the area, ACLA has helped to provide scholarships and other incentives to encourage Latino youth to continue their education beyond high school (Narcisse, 2007).

In addition to focusing on improving student achievement, the Georgia Project also focuses on improving services with the help of ACLA. ESL classes have become a priority because the majority of Hispanics moving into Whitfield County are from Mexico, often with

limited English proficiency. These classes are taught by Georgia Project teachers. As their English language skills improve, participants have found that their job relations and their school involvement have also improved. In addition, the Georgia Project teachers have been able to recruit Latino businesses for ACLA, and ACLA has grown and has become very involved in the schools. When ACLA saw there were ways that the organization can help families in this area to improve, its members decided to unite the business and discuss with owners ways they could benefit families (Narcisse, 2007).

Why It Was Effective

The most important involvement partnerships have with schools is parental involvement. Schools experience significant difficulty establishing external connections to the community without parental involvement. In communities with low socioeconomic conditions the task becomes very difficult to help students connect and stay involved in school (Narcisse, 2007).

Empowerment is a key component that school and community partnerships provide to families in the community. As individuals emerge from isolation to connectedness, they come together to join the community partnership in the context of improving student achievement. As they focus on empowerment techniques for students, communities learn how to self-govern and organize themselves successfully. The vision they help to bring about sustains partnerships for the long-term (Narcisse, 2007; Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006).

From its inception, insightful leadership by well-respected community leaders has played a significant role in its success, along with a consistent, clear vision and a willingness to collect the needed resources to bring to bear to identify problems and to implement strategic action plans to resolve them. Going “outside the box” to the University of Monterrey played a key role in the initial success of the Georgia Project and its focus on assisting Hispanic youth to progress

in their new culture. The written accord played a vital role in documenting the commitment of participating stakeholders in the overall project. Involvement of parents in literacy classes and school-based and community-related activities has resulted in a much greater level of participation in schools supported by Georgia Project teachers (Narcisse, 2007).

The longevity of the George Project is due to the foundation of individuals brought together in the beginning. The Georgia Project continues because:

1. The program could recreate itself and to establish networks to resolve the needs of Latino students in the county.
2. The Georgia Project continued to improve the partnership every year and show results through student academic achievement and school improvement shown by annual yearly progress (AYP).
3. The Georgia Project continues to work with ACLA, community members, parents, students and local businesses for sustainability (Narcisse, 2007).

Ease of Facilitating the Program

A program of this complexity is not easy to facilitate. At the same time, Mr. Mitchell was in a position to understand both his community and the problem his daughter advised him of. He had the support in place before going to the Dalton City Commission with a proposal to solve a problem they were beginning to be aware of and had not yet addressed. By having the requisite decision-makers from the community and the schools involved and by bringing in the University of Monterrey as a cultural and bilingual resource, Mr. Mitchell made the Georgia Project a key resource for the community, the schools, and the Latino students and families. Once the bilingual teachers from the University of Monterrey arrived in Dalton, all stakeholders could see progress (Narcisse, 2007).

Challenges to Overcome When Designing and Facilitating the Program

One of the major goals of education in the United States has always been to improve student performance. As obstacles to achievement of this goal are identified, strategies are developed to overcome them. Poverty has proved to be a persistent obstacle to student improvement. Impoverished families continue to experience difficulty receiving quality education in the United States (Narcisse, 2007).

Hispanic immigration into Whitfield county brought an enormous economic prosperity to the community. At the same time the community was not prepared to deal with the cultural differences brought by the immigrant families. Resistance to change by members of the dominant culture can be a significant barrier to programs designed to empower language-minority or cultural-minority populations. The Georgia Project was able to reduce resistance through the creation of ACLA and relationships within the community that led to increased acceptance of and by the Latino community (Narcisse, 2007).

From Individual Student Needs to Community Understanding and Support—

Growing a Multidimensional Family Literacy Program, Waco, TX

In the fall of 2001, a pilot tutoring program began at the University Middle School. This program evolved into a community-sponsored, multidimensional family literacy program sponsored by the César Chávez Middle School (CCMS) in South Waco, Texas, based on an understanding of the importance of the family in education as well as a basic philosophical change in educational delivery (Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006).

The Challenge

In the fall of 2001, a professor from Baylor University's College of Education met informally with the principal of the University Middle School. The professor offered to provide tutoring services by his education students for the English language learners (ELLs) who were achieving the lowest scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skill (TAKS) mandated exams (Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006).

Relevant Demographics

The ethnic composition of the community CCMS serves is approximately 88% Hispanic, nine percent African-American, and three percent Anglo. Spanish is spoken to more than 42% of the households and one in three of these households is considered to be linguistically isolated. Free or reduced lunches are provided to more than 95% of the elementary and middle school students in the community. Enrollment in bilingual or English as a second language (ESL) programs accounts for 34% of the students in South Waco. An additional 39% of the students not in these programs are considered to be of limited English proficiency (LEP). 73% of the Hispanic students met the reading standards of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in 2002. This was 17% lower than the percentages of the other students in the school district and of the state. Retention rates in grades 1-3 of CCMS' feeder schools are higher than state or district averages (Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006).

The Response

After their informal conversation, in the fall of 2001 the university professor's education students, with the support of the CCMS principal, became tutors for 25 English language learners (ELLs) who had achieved low scores on the Texas annual grade level exams on reading. These students met for 45 minutes of tutoring twice weekly with Wood's education students. The number of students doubled in the spring. The program helped the bilingual Hispanic and

African-American students in South Waco to pass the state-mandated exams for the first time in their history. In 2002, after at least 70% of the students had passed at grade level in each of the core subjects, the state of Texas gave the school “recognized” status (Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006).

Rather than targeting group skill building, tutors targeted individual student weaknesses and had helped students fill in missing skills and concepts. This process had enhanced the students’ overall understanding of past and present educational experiences. During these tutoring sessions, teachers discovered that most students came from households where adults could not read, write, or speak English. A school-wide follow-up study revealed that 70% of CCMS’ parents did not speak English. It became clear this lack of proficiency in English, coupled with a lack of understanding of the American education system, created significant barriers to interaction between parents and school personnel. As the new school opened in South Waco, a large number of Hispanics moved to the school. This language need was identified by university personnel, school personnel, and parents as a family issue that needed to be resolved for the students to be successful academically (Woods, Rogers & Yancy, 2006).

Key Characteristics of the Program

A committee comprised of business and community leaders, parents, teachers, and friends of the school, met monthly to discuss ways to improve the school and increase parental involvement. The committee obtained broad-based community, parent, and staff input, and provided information to those people on a systematic basis (Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006).

Professor Wood and Professor Rogers, from the School of Social Work, put together a family literacy program called Learning English Among Friends (LEAF) which began in 2003. Initially responsive to CCMS parents, based on community response, LEAF quickly opened its

doors to anyone from the community who wanted to attend. By Spring, 2004, 160 adults were enrolled and the age of adult ESL participants ranged from 18 to 73 (Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006). The program included YMCA-facilitated child care for children of all ages while the adults were in ESL classes. Dinners were provided weekly with guest speakers addressing topics of interest to parents such as healthcare and basic financial planning. Based on requests from community members, GED courses and a computer class were added to the adult literacy curriculum. These two courses brought in two more community partners, the community college and a nonprofit, grant-funded program intended to help more Hispanic youth attend college.

The tutoring program for students expanded to include math skills to help students to develop math content academic vocabulary and literacy skills required to meet the challenges of the Texas state exams.

As the LEAF program progressed, it became a symbol of a community becoming aware to the possibility of achieving the dreams they had when they immigrated to the United States. The Rapoport Foundation, a local family foundation, encouraged CCMS to expand its vision to a vision of South Waco as a community where all residents develop their potential in the context of healthy families and a thriving community. Community partners developed a theme of “Strengthening Families, Building Community” and agreed on six long-term goals in four categories: education, family and community life, employment and health. (See Table one.) With support from the Rapoport Foundation and the Baylor/Waco Foundation, LEAF was able to expand in its second year beyond ESL for adults and math tutoring/enrichment for middle school students to a more full-fledged family literacy program (Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006).

Table 1—Goals and Objectives in “Strengthening Families, Building Community”

Education	1. Every adult will be proficient in reading, writing, and speaking English.
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	2. With their parents' active support every child will be making satisfactory progress in learning at home, pre-school, or school.
	3. Every adult will have a high school diploma or GED or be making progress toward it.
Family and community	4. All family units, including single adults, will be engaged in the life of the community through social, religious, educational, and or civic activities.
Employment	5. All adults with a high school diploma or GED who want to work will be engaged in post-secondary education or learning that prepares them for employment or advancement in employment
Health	6. Every adult will have fundamental knowledge about personal healthcare and the healthcare system in Central Texas.

(Adapted from Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006, pp. 49-50)

Why It Was Effective

The programs at César Chávez Middle School have demonstrated the importance of academic enrichment and ESL to a community-based middle school in communities with significant language-minority populations. Middle schools are critical in their communities because so many students decide to drop out of school or to continue when they become young adolescents. CCMS' response to the needs of middle school students linked to parental education and community building resulted in a change in both the school and its neighborhood.

CCMS learned the following:

1. In a disadvantaged community, education needs to be seen as involving parents beyond attending meetings to include ESL, GED, or other types of educational experiences.

2. Planning needs to extend beyond the school building. The positive effect of having community members other than parents work with children in the school has led to increased community support for the school's mission.
3. The administration of a program such as LEAF may or may not include a site-based team that is willing to be innovative and take risks (Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006, p. 52).

The program was research-based, focused on clearly identified student needs and involved commitment of resources from the university, the school and the community from its inception. The vision expanded as students and parents experienced success and value from the program. Word of the program's value spread throughout the community. Programs were tailored to individual student needs. Tutoring resources came from teachers in training. The needs of adult parents were identified, and needed training was offered in the evenings with dinner, child care, hot topics, and community support added as needed to meet community learner demand. Leadership for the program evolved to a full committee with community support (Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006).

Ease of Facilitating the Program

The program involved an enormous commitment of everyone involved. As students and parents perceived value from participating in the program, participants shared additional needs. The program responded to these added needs and continued to develop and grow.

Challenges to Overcome When Designing and Facilitating the Program

Middle schools are critical in communities because their students make choices that will impact the likelihood of their dropping out of school or continuing their education. Academic

enrichment and ESL are important to both parents and students connected to a community-based middle school. Middle schools can become more effective by responding to community needs.

Literate parents assist their children to appreciate the value of education. Without literacy, the values passed on from parents to children often do not endorse education. To create positive change, 21st C century schools need to collaborate with other community-based programs and schools (Wood, Rogers & Yancey, 2006).

Bilingual Literacy Bags for Seventh-Grade ELLs—Miami, FL

A bilingual teacher wanted to help her middle school ELLs change from being reluctant readers to avid readers.

The Challenge

Many ELLs in middle school are identified as late, reluctant readers because their English language proficiency (ELP) skills make reading challenging. A bilingual seventh-grade teacher in Miami, Florida, wanted to give her students an opportunity to become avid readers with the help of a family literacy project. This teacher wanted to build a literacy bridge between the family and the classroom that would connect cultural and linguistic aspects of students' lives (Avery, 2003).

Relevant Demographics

Students in this bilingual seventh-grade classroom were predominantly Hispanic from homes that spoke both Spanish and English. Many had extended families that played an important role in family values. Dade county Florida has a significant Hispanic population and extensive reading support resources in the form of text materials in both English and Spanish (Avery, 2003).

The Response

Based on research regarding the success of family literacy projects with younger students, the bilingual teacher decided to create a family literacy project called *The Bilingual Bag* for her classes. She applied for and received a grant from the Dade Reading Council for her Bilingual Bags (Avery, 2003).

Key Characteristics of the Program

Each bilingual bag has dual language books. Students and a family member read the same book. One copy of the book is in English and the other is in Spanish. The bag contains a family journal where both students and family members write their reactions to the book and to the shared reading experience. Instructions are provided in English and Spanish on activities to do in connection with reading the book. Participating students and family members sign a contract in which they agree to read the books and to return the bag within two or three weeks. As a family finishes a bag it is circulated to other families. The program calls for five bags to be in rotation at any one time. The titles included in the students' bags are students' and parents' favorites: "*The Little Prince* and *Principito*, *The Secret Garden* and *Jardin Secreto*, *Cricket in Times Square* and *Un Grillo en Times Square*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* and *Harry Potter Y Camara Secreta* and *Out of the Dust* and *Lejos Del Polvo*" (Avery, 2003, p. 61). These titles are available via the Internet and by mail through the Sundance catalog. All the books in the bilingual bags were purchased at local bookstores (Avery, 2003).

Why It Was Effective

The program opened a partnership with family members and students "by eliminating obstacles. The challenge of engaging students as lifelong readers can be fostered with the connection to their families.

Sharing a story with someone who has read the same book is one of the joys of being a good reader. As families participated with the Bilingual Bag, family discussions became informal "book talks." Both readers in a family chronicle ideas and conversations in the journal entries. These spoken and written records of personal reading experiences often lead to interpretations and reflections that might otherwise not have been shared among each family involved in the project. Many students involved their grandparents. One grandmother had heard so much about Harry Potter she read the book in Spanish while her grandchild read the book in English (Avery, 2003).

Ease of Facilitating the Program

Once funding was secured and titles were collected from students and parents, supplies were readily available. Families need to agree to participate in the project. Students and families enjoyed interacting with the bilingual bags. Coordinating the bags is a minor responsibility that can be shared with students (Avery, 2003).

Potential Challenges to Overcome When Designing and Facilitating the Program

The process of transforming reluctant readers to avid readers is a gradual one. This program provides the opportunity for family literacy for families who choose to participate (Avery, 2003).

Family Literacy Bags Project for Kindergartens—California and Utah

The project focused on kindergarten students in four school districts in the western United States (California and Utah). Literacy bags have been shown to be an effective tool for improving family literacy skills for young children (Dever & Burts, 2002; Richardson, Miller, Richardson & Sacks, 2008). One of the school districts was a city school district; the other three

were rural school districts. Kindergarten students participating in the project were a mix of native-English-speakers and ELLs (Dever & Burts, 2002).

The Challenge

The general purpose of the project was to encourage and support home book-reading and discussions, other book related activities, and for kindergarten children to demonstrate initial and sustained interest in and enthusiasm for using the family literacy bag (FLB) at home (Dever & Burts, 2002).

Relevant Demographics

Three of the four school districts involved were experiencing an increase in the number of nonnative English speaking families, primarily Spanish-speaking (Dever & Burts, 2002).

The Response

The project was designed to: (a) increase parental involvement in book reading and related activities (e.g., number of books read, time spent reading, and time spent engaged in book related discussions and activities), (b) increase children's involvement in book reading and related activities with other family members (e.g., extended family, older siblings), and (c) for kindergarten children to demonstrate initial and sustained interest in and enthusiasm using the FLB at home (Dever & Burts, 2002).

Key Characteristics of the Program

All participating districts provided enough Family Literacy Bags to kindergarten teachers so that children in their classrooms could take bags home about every third week. Each FLB contained a guidebook for parents to read and to discuss with their children and three high-quality children's books at varied reading-developmental levels and genres. The books and activities focused around a theme (e.g., buttons, change, and gardening). Except for common

household items such as pencils, all materials needed for the extension activities were included in the bags (Dever & Burts, 2002).

The FLBs were explained to parents at Back to School Night. Parents were reminded of the importance of regular reading with their child, to read so that the child can see the text and illustrations, to allow the child to select the book(s) to be read, and to re-read books at the child's request. Guidelines for book discussions included open-ended questions specific to each book. Suggested activities were included to extend the theme of the bag. Some of the FLBs contained materials in Spanish and English. Ten FLBs were provided to each teacher per session of kindergarten she or he taught to ensure that each child in the class could take a FLB home for one week every third week (Dever & Burts, 2002).

Prior to the implementation of the project, teachers participated in an in-service meeting at the beginning of the school year.

The in-service focused on: (a) parent involvement in general and other strategies for involving parents representing diverse populations (b) the FLB as a specific parent involvement strategy (c) maintenance and use of the FLB, and (d) conducting action research to evaluate the FLB and to guide practice (Dever & Burts, 2002).

Why It Was Effective

Most Spanish-speaking families appreciated having the books and materials in their native language. Some parents could not read in English and appreciated the Spanish translation. Others used the dual language books to learn more English. With both Spanish and English books available, Spanish-speaking families learn that their native culture and language are valued. Children continue to learn in their native language as they become increasingly proficient with English (Dever & Burts, 2002).

Parents were reminded to (or learned to) make book reading interactive and they expanded their understanding of effective ways to accomplish this. Both parents and teachers indicated that the guiding discussion questions helped parents' and children's discussions of books. Other findings suggest that parents learned of new book titles and they learned that books can be used to teach children concepts. Some indicated that the theme approach enabled them to discuss a topic (feelings, for example) in depth. Finally, the FLB project helped parents garner information about their children's varied interests and developing skills (Dever & Burts, 2002).

The positive response of parents and teachers about children's enthusiasm for taking home a FLB indicate children's initial interest in the FLB. Because no indication that children became tired of taking the FLB home has surfaced, their interest in the FLB was probably sustained (Dever & Burts, 2002).

Ease of Facilitating the Program

The volume of the program and feedback from participants made it somewhat challenging. Overall, with all the support provided, the program required minimal maintenance (Dever & Burts, 2002).

Challenges to Overcome When Designing and Facilitating the Program

Some parents became weary of children bringing home "homework," including FLBs. Perhaps teachers should critically analyze homework expectations to be certain that assigned homework merits asking busy families to spend precious time on it. Teachers need to promote the FLB project as an enjoyable family activity and not a laborious homework task. Research indicates that to promote academic literacy, reading may be prioritized over homework. (Dever & Burts, 2002).

A few parents expressed a negative reaction to the inclusion of Spanish materials. Acknowledge and valuing families from diverse cultural backgrounds should be a priority for parent education. Books available in the language of others provide a rich opportunity to learn about others. Monolingual parents may need to be introduced to these concepts. Bilingual parents may need to understand that their children will benefit from knowing two languages (Dever & Burts, 2002).

Parent Literacy Involvement for Student and Parent Empowerment—Carpinteria, CA

In the 1980s, Carpinteria, California, had a Spanish-only preschool program that was cited in literature as being a positive example for creating a solid foundation for ELLs to advance their language proficiency (Cummins, 1995). School and community partnership studies have been reported in several studies (Cummins, 1995; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; 1994a; 1994b; Narcisse, 2007). The research reported here was part of a five-year family literacy study in the Carpinteria School District reviewed from a sociocultural perspective with regard to empowerment of Spanish-speaking children and their families. This project illustrates the empowerment potential of collective work when parents learn to read with their children for the purpose of understanding texts in relation to their experience (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994b).

The Challenge

Spanish-speaking students in the third and fourth grades at Morgan Elementary School needed support in their reading skills. Researchers and their assistants met with parent-members of the Comité de Padres Latinos (COPLA) (Committee for Latin Parents) and with school administrators to decide on the research project. Family literacy received strong support as a project of significant benefit to children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994b).

Relevant Demographics

Carpinteria, California, is about 25 miles south of Santa Barbara. Before the late 1950s and early 1960s, the community was ethnically segregated, and one of the schools was designated as the Mexican school. The gradual social and economic movement upward of many Mexican American families has been evident over the years. Sometimes more than one family shares a house.

While many Mexican American families have improved their socioeconomic condition, informants believe that issues such as child care, housing for low-income people, education that will discourage students from dropping out, and medical services for low-income families remain challenges for the entire community to solve (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).

Of the nearly 12,000 residents, 67% are white, 31% are Mexican Americans, one percent are Asians, half of one percent are blacks, and others, including American Indians, are also one half of one percent. The Latino population is largely Mexican Americans, whose history in California ranges from the time of Mexican rule (early eighteenth century) to recent immigrants from Mexico. The number of immigrants from Central and South America appears to be increasing. Linguistically, this Latino population consists of English-only speakers, bilingual speakers, and limited-English speakers. Seventy percent of this group are English speaking and have lived in the community for three or more generations. Although the census refers to this population as "Hispanic," the participants identify themselves as "Mexican," "Mexican American," and/or "Latino."

The Mexican population was overrepresented in the fields of farming, fishing, and the resort industry as compared to their Anglo counterparts on census data about Carpinteria. The immigrant Mexican group accounts for approximately 48% of the bilingual and Spanish-only

sector and are employed in service jobs or as laborers. Some people, however, work out of town in Ventura or Santa Barbara.

Carpinteria School District serves a total of just over 2,000 students. Approximately 700 students (35%) of this enrollment are Hispanic, and the 280 limited English-speaking students comprise 40% of all Hispanic students. The school district's central administration is exclusively Anglo, with the exception of one Mexican American male who coordinates the Migrant Program and one Mexican American principal. Carpinteria school district has six schools: four elementary, one junior high, and one high school. Each school deals with specific requirements from the following state and federal program funds: Chapter I, Economic Impact Aid (EIA), State Preschool, School Improvement Program, Special Education, and Migrant Education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991).

The Response

A family literacy project was set-up so that parents would attend literacy classes and learn how to read with their children. Parents were taught to ask their children a series of questions of increasing complexity. They would read with their children at home. The project had three research questions:

1. How does parental use of literature with their children influence the parents' perception of self efficacy regarding literacy tasks?
2. How are household relations affected as a result of parent-child literacy activity?
3. How did the literacy project create new social networks for parents?

Researchers maintained the concept of the questioning strategy as a way of organizing the presentation of children's storybooks to parents. Books had different themes.

In the literacy classes parents had the opportunity to practice creating and asking each other questions and to discuss the books. In this way they learned how to think about the stories and their relationship to their own experience, making it possible to develop appropriate questions for their children. Parents were videotaped asking questions of their children five times throughout the project—one videotaped session before they had any parent training and a videotaped session every other month after the training.

Parents began to form a collaborative community and assisted one of the families with round-trip transportation to the literacy trainings when the family would otherwise have had to drop out. Family readers were multigenerational. In some cases older siblings read to younger children when parents could not make time to do so (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994b).

Key Characteristics of the Program

Ten families of Spanish-speaking students attending Morgan Elementary School were involved in the project. Parents received literacy training in how to help their children engage in reading and asking questions about the reading that allowed the tying of text to personal experience and values. The eight books selected for the program were prescreened to encourage discussion in families in this community.

Empowerment was reflected in how parents and children drew meanings from reading together and how they shared and related their experiences to the texts.

Families in the study increased awareness of their identity as community members sharing a common cultural base. Sharing this cultural heritage as they read the books with their children provided parents with support and confidence. As parents became more confident in their literacy skills, they also volunteered for more involvement and participation in COPLA and in school activities.

The empowerment the families gained during this process enabled them to become involved in teaching other parents. In a real way the project had a networking effect. In this way this empowerment extended from the individuals to the group.

Students responded well to the questioning from their parents and built their literacy skills and abilities to tie text to their own experience (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994b).

Why It Was Effective

Mrs. Reyes made significant contributions in her roles as project trainer and as the cultural broker between the COPLA parent group and this group of parents who had been less involved with the school. Some parents also took on new roles which contributed to the success of the project.

A written agreement between the university-sponsored research team and the parents was required for continuity in the literacy project. The agreement spelled out the responsibilities of both the parents and the researchers.

Parents were able to create a collaborative atmosphere and to generate trust and synergy between each other and the project team. This sense of trust in the project carried over into their interactions with their children. Students engaged more willingly with the adult readers and they were better with the children.

Research indicates that parents impart sociocultural knowledge based on their own experience when reading with their children. As they convey values and their world view about their position in society, they instill a sense of confidence in their children that they are important enough to receive their parents' attention

The video tapes of the reading sessions between parent and children showed parents becoming increasingly more skilled and comfortable both in reading and in asking questions

when discussing reading with their children. Some parents learned to read in both English and in Spanish.

Literacy, embedded in a social process, transforms people's organization in the home as a result of the new ideas and practices are acquired.

Increased awareness among parents was evidenced by a positive change in their self-perception and efficacy in being able to participate directly in their children's literacy learning (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994b).

Ease of Facilitating the Program

This was a long duration project involving classes for parents as well as provision of reading resources to families. While the components were in place to make it successful, it required focus to complete all tasks and to have everything in place when needed (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994b).

Challenges to Overcome When Designing and Facilitating the Program

Some of the parents could not read Spanish at the beginning of the program. This family had problems with transportation which COPLA and the parents in the literacy program were able to resolve. Later in the program, the parents stopped reading to their daughter and an older sibling took over.

The researchers and the parents involved kept the vision clear to do whatever was required for the project to be successful. When an obstacle emerged, they found a way to eliminate its power (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994b).

Conclusions

These studies indicate strongly that parent involvement in literacy programs contributes to student achievement and empowerment of both students and families. The most successful programs had a broad base of community support, an ongoing and on-site relationship with university educators, and extensive support services provided for and available to parents. Programs clearly aligned with the needs of students and parents and provided with timely and effective resources produced better results. Bilingual literacy bags for one classroom required the least amount of funding and the Georgia Project appeared to require the greatest amount of funding. Four of the five programs focused exclusively on ELL families. Depending on the focus of the literacy program, working exclusively with ELLs could be more effective in dealing with multicultural and multilingual needs, issues, and concerns.

Summary

The purpose of this working paper was to review current literature on literacy programs for parents of ELLs. The paper included a summary of five literacy programs for ELL parents throughout the United States of America. Four of these were system-wide interventions affecting more than one school or classroom. Each program had a positive impact on student academic achievement. Three programs focused on empowerment for both students and parents. The most powerful interventions were supported by the community, parents and school and school district personnel and included varying degrees of involvement by university educators. Three interventions specifically targeted students and parents at the secondary level. The paper concluded by summarizing the success criteria shared by these programs.

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¹ The Georgia Project began with Dalton city schools. Winfield County Schools were added and Dalton city schools withdrew from participation. The project continued with Winfield County Schools and was expanded to other parts of Georgia. The Hispanic population in 1995 was greater in Dalton city schools. This has changed over the intervening time frame.